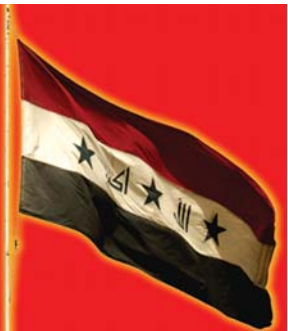




THIS WEEK IN IRAQ



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U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Patrick Dixon

An Iraqi citizen votes at a polling center in Al Hilla on Dec. 15. Iraqi citizens are electing their first permanent parliamentary government, which will lead the new democracy for the next four years.

Millions turn out to vote in a democratic Iraq

BAGHDAD — The day seemed downright festive: children marched in impromptu parades, men wore suits (on their day off no less), entire families took long walks from their homes to polling sites.

**Story by
SpC. Dan Balda**
4th Brigade
Combat Team, 3rd ID
Public Affairs Office

The Iraqi parliamentary elections on Dec. 15 gave Iraqis a chance to showcase the pride they have in their country and the hope they have for the future.

“Nationalism is defined by the actions of the people,” said Maj. Ross Coffman, 4th Brigade Combat Team executive officer.

“It only takes a moment to see their faces as they vote, to see their pride, not only because they are voting but because they are part of something bigger. That is promising. Not only for the efforts we’ve made, but also for the future of the country.”

The future seems to be the center of Coffman’s focus and for good reason.

“Today, they chose their leaders for the next four years,” Coffman said. “If someone chooses to vote as many did, they chose to vote because they believe in the future of their country. It’s another step for democracy for this country, but it also shows that Iraqis believe in their future.”

See *ELECT*, Page 4

Gen. Casey's Corner

The Iraqi people had a great day on Dec. 15. It was the third national poll that they have had this year. There was a high voter turnout and we expect far above the October level.

Additionally, there was low violence across Iraq. The Iraqi security forces performed wonderfully all across Iraq during the election and maintained security at the polling sites. One element that I am particularly proud of is the turnout in the Al Anbar Province, a western province in Iraq that has been a trouble spot. We saw the number of voters increase substantially over the October referendum. It's a good sign of Sunni involvement in the political process.

The sentiment for Election Day was really set in the morning when there was an IED attack against a polling site in Kharma. The Iraqis went out, repaired the wall, and were open for voting at 7 a.m. That is the spirit that led the day and was another great performance here by the people of Iraq.

What the Iraqi people and the Coalition have accomplished here in less than three years is unprecedented. Three years ago, Saddam Hussein was still tyrannizing the Iraqi people. In less than three years the Iraqis have taken sovereignty of their country, formed an

By Gen. George W. Casey
Multi-National Force - Iraq
Commanding General



interim government, held elections for a transitional government, written a constitution, approved the constitution, and elected an assembly.

Meanwhile, they have built up an Iraqi security force of more than 200,000. All of this was accomplished against the backdrop of a ruthless and resilient insurgency. It is remarkable, and as I

said, it is unprecedented.

We still have a lot of work to do here in Iraq in 2006. The new government still needs to take office. There are some tough political and economic development challenges ahead. There will be a debate on amending the constitution and there will be a debate on federalism.

Regarding economics, there is a decades-long economic challenge here. We should not expect the political, economic nor insurgency challenges to just go away because there were elections. Expect a gradual reduction in these issues as their root causes are addressed over time.

I am proud of the men and women of the Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces. It gives me great solace to know that we have the best armed forces in the world out there when the going gets the toughest.

Air-manning convoys

BALAD AIR BASE — Moving supplies across Iraq can be a daunting task, but it is one that more than 150

Story by
Staff Sgt.
Tammie Moore
332nd Air
Expeditionary Wing

Airmen from nine Air Force specialty codes assigned to Detachment 2632 have come together to do.

The 732nd Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron "in-lieu-of" forces is assisting the Army's 181st Transportation Battalion in running convoys throughout Iraq.

"About 25 percent of my Airmen have done this mission before," said Capt. Richard Pike, 732nd ELRS Det. 2632 commander, "and there are 15 people who have only been in service for a year."

Chief Master Sgt. Shawn Keller, 732nd ELRS Det. 2632 chief enlisted manager, is one of the Airmen who has done this before. He was deployed to Balad in February 2004 when the Air Force first began providing the Army convoy support.

"We have four other people here who were on the first gun truck missions conducted at Balad and are going to be here when it closes down," Keller said. "The Air Force is transferring the mission back to the Army because we have been tasked for a new mission. Their new mission is to perform line-haul convoys based elsewhere in Southwest Asia."

Despite the end of this specific Air Force mission, the Airmen remain focused on other aspects of their job maintaining convoy vehicles and providing security during trips for Logistic Prime, KBR and Army line-haul units.

The Airmen have embraced the various missions, learning as much as they can about different aspects of the detachment.

"Our Airmen come from career fields that range from intelligence to supply, vehicle maintenance to security forces," Keller said. "Everyone came here trained in their job. You cannot tell one AFSC from the other; we are all one AFSC."

"The Airmen we have out here take a lot of pride in their mission and it shows," said Keller.

"They receive a lot of respect from the Army. Many of the Airmen also realize their deployment to Iraq is unique," said Keller.

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Baghdad Job Center offers skills

BAGHDAD — Although many people in Mashtal, a small suburb in east Baghdad, have had to battle unemployment, a new job center is poised to alleviate at least some of the problem.

**Story by
Master Sgt.
David Abrams**

2nd Brigade
Combat Team, 3rd ID
Public Affairs Office

The facility,
the brainchild
of the Tissa
Nissan District
Council and
Mashtal
Neighborhood

Council, boasts an internet café, computer instruction center, an instructional sewing shop, and a small store and a cafeteria. The center hopes to add an instructional rug-making shop in the near future.

The employment center is expected to encourage other small businesses to spring to life in the area.

Dr. Kareem Alambar, a member of the Tissa Nissan District Council, said the new facility should be a great help to his community: "The use of the facility is free for all residents. People can come here and learn about computers and use the internet; and the women can learn tailoring skills, too."

The facility has more than a dozen computers available for public use and training.

Alambar believes the new facility could help up to 1,000 people a month.

The employment center is a refurbished bomb shelter that had been built by a Swedish contractor during the former regime. It is a huge complex with plenty of room for expansion.

The transformation of the bomb shelter into an employment center cost about \$62,000 and more than 20 Iraqi workers were involved in the project, which took about 30 days to complete.

The business center manager, Gusun Nagi, a software engineer who graduated from El Rafidian College, said anyone who wants to learn about the internet and computers should come in.

She wants to highlight the center and encourage foreign investors by showing the potential of the Iraqi people.

One of the computer/internet instructors, Wamid Saad, said it's good to expose the Iraqi people to cyberspace.



U.S. Army photo by Master Sgt. David Abrams

An Iraqi woman demonstrates her skill behind one of a dozen sewing machines at the new Mashtal Employment Center in the Tissa Nissan district.

"First of all, the Iraqi people do not know much about computers so we need to let them know what computers can do," Saad said. "Then they might be able to work in a job where the skills they learned here will benefit themselves and a company, too."

Saad, who has a Bachelor's Degree in computers, expects the internet café will be very popular with all members in the community.

Nader Abduel Hammeed, a physics teacher, from a nearby boys' school went to the center to learn about computers.

"The teachers here are very good," Hammeed said. "In the beginning, it was very hard to learn, but it is getting easier. Yes, this place will help people to get jobs. I want to learn some things about physics in the world," he added. "Now I can be in contact with physics instructors in other countries."

The tailoring classes, where students receive instruction on how to sew traditional clothing, are popular with women in the community, but they will also provide an outlet to generate additional funding for the facility.

Buthaina Sadiq, of Mashtal, said the facility will be able to sell its wares on the open market.

"First of all, the (Deshdesha, the black dress most women wear in Iraq) will be very inexpensive and we will make and sell a lot of them—probably more than 100 dozen of them each month," Sadiq said.

Samera Kalef Al-Ka'by, a member of the Tissa Nissan DAC, did a lot of work on getting this project completed and believes the sewing classes will help people get jobs.

"There are many jobs for tailors in the community, and the goal here is to get jobs for people and make them work," Al-Ka'by said.



U.S. Army photo by Master Sgt. David Abrams

Norris, 14, receives instruction from Abas Talab, a Tissa Nissan District Council member, in the new Mashtal Employment Center.

ELECT

from page 1

Hundreds of thousands of Baghdad residents were able to vote because of the polling station security, provided by Iraqi Security Forces.

Coffman said the violence stayed at or below normal levels. There were a few terrorist attacks with improvised explosive devices and isolated indirect fire incidents, but otherwise election day was very safe, he said. This can be directly attributed to the ISF, who took the lead on all matters electoral.

"The ISF took the front, just as they have

for the last two elections," Coffman said. "Basically, this was run by Iraqis, the polls and the security, and the Americans were there in case something happened and they needed our assistance. Today was another milestone in the ISF's capabilities. They were able to secure numerous sites across the country and prevent anti-Iraqi forces from influencing those sites."

Staff Sgt. James Bryant, a team leader with Company B, 4th Battalion, 64th Armor Regiment was heartened by the performance of the ISF. He has been part of a military transition team training ISF members since August. He ran into a number of his former trainees during a foot patrol through Karradah during the election.

"It's great seeing these men out here because they are like my own Soldiers," he said. "When you train up the new guys in your unit, and you see them excel, it's a good feeling to see them out there and see that they are using all the skills they've learned and (are) doing their job. It's going to make a big difference for this country's future."

Coffman was heartened by the actions of the troops on this monumental occasion.

"The job the Iraqis and our forces have done is nothing



U.S. Army photo by Spc. Timothy Story

An Iraqi woman holds an Iraqi flag after voting during the historic on Dec. 15 parliament elections in Baghdad.

short of amazing," he said. "The Military Transition Teams and Special Police Training Teams that have stood beside the Iraqi forces during training and mission execution over the last year will carry Iraqi security in the future for the next five to 10 years. It's an honor being part of America's team here in Iraq, standing side by side with Iraq's team making sure that this is a safe place for the Iraqi people."



U.S. Army Photo by Staff Sgt. John R. Rozean

Soldiers from the 3rd Bde., 6th Iraqi Army Div. celebrate outside an Iraqi Parliamentary Election polling station on Dec. 12, after voting. The Iraqi security forces voted early so they could provide security, while the rest of the nation voted three days later.

Iraq Army first to the polls in national election

TAJI — Iraqi Army Soldiers northwest of Baghdad voted three days before the country's national elections, freeing them for duty on Dec. 15.

Story by
Sgt. Matthew Wester
3rd Brigade, 1st Armor
Public Affairs Office

Camp Taji, north of Baghdad.

"I am very glad," said Pvt. Zaheer, an infantryman with 9th Iraqi Army Mechanized Division. "This is good for all Iraqis, not just for us."

This is the third time in a year Iraqis have participated in democratic elections, following the success of the interim government elections in January and the Constitutional Referendum in October.

The Iraqi Soldiers formed long columns and marched to the polls.

"The Iraqi Security Forces vote early so they can do their job on election day, which is primarily to provide security for the cit-

izens of Iraq so that they have an opportunity to vote in a safe environment," said Capt. Richard Hicks, a team leader for Company A, 490th Civil Affairs Battalion. His team works with the citizens of the area to improve infrastructure and quality of life.

"The Iraqi Security Forces are the lead element in providing this security. They are the ones people see at the polling sites," Hicks said. "It's a further demonstration of their ability to take the lead as they will guide their country following the election."

The Soldiers took charge of security during the recent referendum vote and were successful at curbing attacks and ensuring citizens made it to the polls safely.

After voting, some troops danced and sang patriotic songs. One Soldier led his comrades in a chant extolling the virtues of their favorite candidates.

"It really means a lot to see how much enthusiasm they have," Hicks said. "It's just a very warming experience to share that with them here and see democracy in action."

"I hope for democracy and security for this country," Zaheer said as he headed to the polls to cast his vote.



Heroes of the Week

Army doc delivers democratic baby

BAGHDAD — On the eve of Parliamentary elections, a fortuitous birth took place at the 10th Combat Support Hospital here.

Story by
Sp. Rick Rzepka
This Week in Iraq
Assistant Editor

On the outskirts of Habbaniyah, 50 miles west of Baghdad near Fallujah, an expectant 38-year-old mother knew she needed help.

Her water had just broken and election curfew restrictions were near, forcing her to make a tough decision.

She knew her midwife could only provide limited care and that if she and her baby were to survive, she would need a miracle.

"Did I save the mother and baby's lives... maybe," said Col. Brian Crisp, M.D., who is the chief of obstetrics and gynecology at the hospital. "The bottom line is that you would not electively deliver a breached baby out there," he said.

Crisp, who has delivered more than a thousand babies during his career, said the mother was breached and labored, meaning that the baby was coming out with her butt down.

"She was the first democratic baby in Iraq and he saved her," said Capt. Ron White, M.D., an anesthesiologist at the 10th CSH.

The mother came under Crisp's and the hospital staff's care through some decisive decision making on the part of Iraqi Army Soldiers who were contacted by the mother's midwife. The IA Soldiers then shuttled her to a nearby forward operating base, where she was flown into Baghdad.

"It's a sign," said the baby's grateful grandmother on the child's being born on the day of the election. The baby, whose name is Tamarra, will grow up in a safer and more secure Iraq now, she said. "I just want peace on Earth."

"This is a very cool thing," said Crisp. "It's a nice change to be bringing life into the world. She's the most spoiled baby in Baghdad right now; all the nurses are clamoring over her."

Only two babies have been delivered at the CSH, and they were both born on Iraqi election days symbolizing a new era in Iraqi governance.

"A beautiful baby like that can give us hope for the future in this troubled land," said Crisp.



U.S. Army photo by Capt. Mark Heard
Army Col. Brian Crisp, M.D., 10th Combat Support Hospital, holds Tamarra. Crisp delivered the child on Dec. 15, the day of Iraqi Parliamentary elections, symbolizing the birth of a new era in Iraqi governance. Tamarra is the second child born at the hospital on the day of an election.

Army Medic meets family of boy he saved

MOSUL — Spc. Lucas Crowe, a medic with Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat

Story courtesy of
Task Force
Freedom
172nd Stryker Brigade

Team, 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry Regiment meets the family of the boy he helped save Dec. 17.

On Dec. 15 while patrolling the streets of Mosul during the Iraqi elections, Crowe resuscitated a boy who had drowned in a flooded basement of his home. The family was elated to see Crowe and thanked him for saving the child.

"I am extremely happy that the boy is doing well," Crowe stated, "It was great to see him and I wish him well."



U.S. Army photo courtesy of Task Force Freedom
Spc. Lucas Crowe, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, stands with the child he saved from drowning, along with the boy's father in Mosul, Dec. 15.



Left: One of the first of a contingent of \$1.8 million worth of surplus US trucks donated to the Iraqi Ministry of Agriculture for its National Animal Health Program. **Above:** Col. Jose Uson, commander of the 322nd Civil Affairs Bde., presents a certificate of ownership to Dr. Dawood M. Sharief, Iraq's Director General of Veterinary Services.

Donation to help Agriculture Ministry

BAGHDAD — Iraq's National Animal Health Program began Monday with a ceremony in Baghdad marking the delivery of the

Story and photos by
Col. Thomas D. Farrell
322nd Civil Affairs Brigade

first contingent of a total of 49 surplus U.S.

trucks to be donated to the Iraq Ministry of Agriculture.

"This plan aims to vaccinate more than 17 million livestock and farm animals throughout the country, affecting about 750,000 Iraqi farmers," said Army Lt. Col. Jim Cummings. A veterinarian with the Army Reserve's 322nd Civil Affairs Brigade of Honolulu, Cummings helped develop the program in partnership with the Ministry's Iraq Veterinary Service.

As the plan evolved, it became clear that the ability to get veterinary supplies and doctors around the country would be the critical link in the vaccination project. The Iraqi government had neither the vehicles nor the funds to obtain them.

"We need to distribute our drugs and

chemicals . . . so these trucks will assist us to distribute all our drugs and chemicals to all veterinary clinics in Iraq," said Dr. Dawood M. Sharief, Iraq's director general of veterinary services.

The surplus Army trucks were made available through the "Humanitarian Assistance Program-Excess Property," which allows the U.S. government to donate materiel which is no longer needed, but still serviceable. The trucks were headed for the scrap yard. The military no longer needed them and the cost of shipping them back to the United States exceeded their value.

U.S. Central Command's Humanitarian Operations Center in Kuwait saved the trucks and matched them up with an Iraqi agency in need.

The Army Reserve's 1158th Transportation Company made minor repairs and arranged to move the trucks to Baghdad, where they were repainted from desert camouflage to civilian white by the Iraqis.

Col. Jose Uson, the brigade's command-

er, presented a certificate of ownership to Dawood, saying, "On behalf of our unit and all those involved here, we're really proud to present these vehicles to you." Army officials estimated the value of the donated trucks at about \$1.8 million.

Dawood said the animal health plan will allow Iraqi cattle breeders to control brucellosis, a huge problem in Iraq that has cost farmers and slaughterhouses over five trillion dinars (\$3.4 million) per year. In addition, the trucks will deliver supplies to be used in Iraq's program of vaccination and surveillance to prevent and detect outbreaks of avian influenza, also known as bird flu. Dawood estimates that more than 500,000 Iraqis raise poultry.

According to Uson, this donation has "opened the door" on using the excess property program to assist Iraq's public health agencies.

"There are other humanitarian assistance supplies, both medical and other, that will be coming because of the process that they've established by getting these vehicles here."

Iraqis protect Samarra during historic election

Brief by Staff Sgt. Mark Wojciechowski, 133rd Mobile Public Affairs Detachment

SAMARRA — Soldiers from 3rd Infantry Division's 3rd Battalion, 69th Armor Brigade stood back and watched the Iraqi Security Forces take control of their polling sites just as

they did earlier this year when votes were cast for the Iraqi constitutional referendum.

Capt. Ryan Wiley commander of Bravo Company 3-69 Armor said, "We are just here if the Iraqi Security Forces need help, they are running the show."

Iraq's security and the establishment of a democratic government prove the country is moving in a positive direction despite sporadic violence, Wiley said.

Embattled region secure for Al Anbar voters

AR RAMADI — Iraqi Security and Coalition Forces helped pave the way for hundreds of thousands of Iraqi citizens in

Story by
Capt. Jeffrey S. Pool
2nd Marine Division
Public Affairs Office

the Al Anbar Province to vote in Iraq's parliamentary elections on Dec. 15.

Voter turnout was robust throughout the province, with a far higher percentage of the predominantly Sunni population participating in the elections than did in the October constitutional referendum. There were few security incidents reported in the Province, and the murder and intimidation campaign that kept many people from the polls during previous votes never materialized.

"Today's vote exceeded all expecta-

tions," said Brig. Gen. James L. Williams, assistant division commander of the 2nd Marine Division. "What we saw today was the result of months of hard work by the Iraqi government, the U.S. Ambassador and his staff, and the international community. Most of all, it clearly demonstrates the resolve of the local Iraqi people to take their rightful place in the democratic process."

In the provincial capital of Ramadi, where only several thousand citizens took part in the referendum, tens of thousands of voters lined the streets to vote. Residents were dancing, singing and waving the Iraqi flag in a rare display of national pride. Members of both the Iraqi Army and the Iraqi Police provided security throughout the city while Coalition Forces remained

largely on the outskirts.

Elsewhere in the province, in cities like Husaybah, Karabilah and Ubaydi, voter turnout was steady throughout the day. Until a few weeks ago, this area near the Syrian border was largely under the influence of al Qaeda in Iraq-led insurgents. Recent Iraqi and Coalition operations such as Steel Curtain and Iron Fist were instrumental in clearing these cities of insurgent fighters.

"No one can look at what happened in Al Anbar today and still deny progress is being made," said Williams. "Overall, attacks against local citizens and Iraqi and Coalition Forces are down, voter turnout is much higher than before and the people are finally beginning to see the fruitlessness of supporting the insurgency."

Freedom rises from Fallujah rubble

FALLUJAH — Buildings and structures still stand riddled with bullets, evidence of last year's encounter in Fallujah where

Story by
Staff Sgt.
Ronna M. Weyland
Marine Expeditionary Force

Marines battled insurgents.

However, the marketplace was thriving as locals turned out for the national election today.

Two months after the constitu-

tional referendum, the people from the city of 80 mosques supported democracy in a peaceful manner for the second time this year.

"The Fallujahans support democracy and want peace," said Mayor Dhari Youssef al Arsah. "They want unity for Iraq and a government that represents all of Iraq."

An estimated 108,000 Fallujah residents voted during the referendum in October and city officials expected a larger turnout during the parliamentary election.

The Iraqi Police raised security measures in an effort to keep the city safe from violence.

Although parts of the city are still in need of infrastructure repairs, citizens still flocked to the 35 polling sites available.

"Out of the rubble came the ballot box," said John Kale Weston, U.S. State Department spokesman.

"The ballot box is going to be there anyway. Whether the people are going to show up or not, it is a test of what the Marines and the political leadership has allowed in the city."

Brig. Gen. Salah Khalil al-Ani, police chief, Iraqi Police Fallujah District, said the most troubling factor was a potential rise in terrorist activity during the elections.

"Countries around the region do not want what is good for Iraq," he said. "It is a structured terrorist arrangement. What I see are acts that hurt innocents."

Early reports showed voters came out all over the city; however, official results will be available in several weeks.

"Some polling sites were running out of ballots," the mayor said. "The turnout is very positive for the people of Fallujah."



Army Photo by Pfc. William Servenski

With his family at his side, an Iraqi man receives his ballot in the landmark national elections, Dec. 15, in downtown Baghdad. In contrast with the referendum elections last January, voter turnout was high and violence was down.

About 90 percent of all MNF-I security detainees in Iraq participated in parliamentary elections. They were some of more than 11 million Iraqis who voted in the Dec. 15 election.



Coalition, Iraqi Security Forces' Operations Review

This week in Iraq focused on the first national democratic elections since the fall of Saddam Hussein, with millions of Iraqis

Operations review by Staff Sgt. Mark St. Clair
Multi-National Corps - Iraq
Public Affairs Office

Iraqi Security Forces, aided by members of Multi-National Corps - Iraq, played a vital role in securing polling sites, and their efforts were seen in the decreased violence on Dec. 15.

"Iraqi Security Forces, with the help of members of the Coalition, conducted security operations to provide a safe and secure environment for Iraqi citizens to vote and exercise their right to free speech," said Lt. Col. Bruce Parker, deputy chief of operations, MNC-I.

Parker said there was a clearly downward trend in the number of enemy attacks during Thursday's elections compared with those in January and October.

"There were four times more attacks in January than there were (Thursday)," Parker said. The main security effort came from the Iraqi army and police forces, whose role was vital in helping their fellow countrymen participate safely.

While Coalition forces were supporting by securing an outer cordon around polling sites, IA forces were creating a secure middle cordon. Finally, Iraqi police secured the inner ring and polling sites.

In the western province of Al Anbar, voter turnout was robust, with preliminary reports indicating that a far higher percentage of the predominantly Sunni population participated in the parliamentary elections than did in October's constitutional referendum. Overall, there were few security incidents reported in the province, and the murder and intimidation campaign that kept many people from the polls during previous votes never materialized.

With tight rings of security circling, citizens in their capital city took to the streets with Iraqi Police providing protection at polling stations. Soldiers and Iraqi officials northwest of Baghdad spent the last week working toward a common goal: making polling sites as secure as possible. Coalition troops transported concrete barriers to polling places to ensure that voters remained safe. The entire planning process was a collaborative effort between Coalition forces, Iraqi officials and ISF.

Also during the week, ISF and forces from Task Force Freedom detained 46 suspected terrorists and seized weapons caches in northern Iraq. Soldiers assigned to the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, detained 14 suspected terrorists and confiscated a large number of weapons, munitions and money as a part of Operation Vanguard Free Speech on Dec. 14.

In Taji on Dec. 18, U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney paid a surprise visit to Iraqi and U.S. Soldiers at Taji Military Training Base. The vice president was there to observe Iraqi and U.S. troops training together

MNF-I Operations

Summary: Dec. 10 to Dec. 16

Total Operations: 465
Combined operations: 238
IEDs found and cleared: 162
foreign fighters captured or killed: 384
Weapons caches found and cleared: 67

and to congratulate them for providing security for the successful elections.

In Tikrit, 15 suspects were detained on Dec. 17 at several locations during Operation Eagle Watch. The mission was conducted by Soldiers of the 101st Airborne Division's 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, who were conducting an area recon near Forward Operating Base Speicher.

Also, a large cache of improvised explosive device components was discovered by Soldiers from Task Force Band of Brothers on Dec. 15 near Hawijah when a pair of scout helicopters from the 101st Airborne Div. spotted several individuals behaving suspiciously. The pilots radioed the location to a nearby patrol from the Division's 1st Brigade Combat Team.

Soldiers from 1st Brigade, 1st Iraqi Army Division began Operation Alkamra Almaner (Moonlight) early Dec. 19 in western Al Anbar. Iraqi army soldiers from three Iraqi battalions are conducting a cordon and knock operation east of Ubaydi. The Iraqi soldiers are being supported by 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines, Regimental Combat Team-2 and 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing (Forward).

"This is the largest-size Iraqi led operation conducted by the Iraqi Army in the Euphrates River Valley supported by coalition forces to date," said Parker.

Operation Moonlight's success should be able to demonstrate the ever-growing capabilities of the IA and solidifying their enduring presence in the Euphrates River Valley, said Parker.



U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. James D. Evans

Marine Sgt. James G. Zippen, with 2nd Bn., 7th Div., MITT, stands alongside Zaid Shaban-Abadal, an Iraqi recon platoon member, while providing security at a polling site in Baghdad on Dec. 15.

Ukrainians paved way for Iraq's 8th Div.

AL KUT — Multi-National Division Central South bid farewell to troops from Ukraine, one of the unit's mainstay nationalities, during a ceremony at Camp Delta.

**Story and photos by
Jim Garamone**
American Forces
Press Service

Polish Army Maj. Gen. Piotr Czerwinski said the Ukrainian contingent has done excellent work in the area and helped provide stability to the region and training to Iraqi troops, who now pick up the mission.

Ukraine will not end its affiliation with the coalition, Multi-National Force Iraq officials said, but large troop deployments will end.

Ukrainian Maj. Gen. Anatoliy Pushniakov, a staff officer with the division, said more than 5,000 Ukrainian Soldiers have deployed to Iraq since the operation began in spring 2003. Ukrainian Soldiers generally spent six months in Iraq, although some have asked to stay longer. A total of 850 Ukrainian Soldiers of the 81st Tactical Group will fly home in the next few days.

"I wish our Soldiers a safe trip and to celebrate the New Year with their families back home," Pushniakov said during the ceremony.

The unit's commander, Maj. Gen. Evgeniy Goroshnikov, said he was proud of the way the unit acted and reacted to changing times in Iraq. "We have been here for two years, and in this time we have learned much about peace-keeping and we have made friends from many different countries," he said through an interpreter.

The Ukrainian contingent lost several Soldiers during the militant "Mahdi Army" uprising in April 2004 and again during disturbances in October 2004. Others have been killed or injured in noncombat accidents.

Goroshnikov wished local Iraqi officials well and praised the



Polish Maj. Gen. Piotr Czerwinski, commander of Multinational Division Central South, presents a plaque to a Ukrainian officer during a farewell ceremony in Al Kut.

Iraqi 8th Division for its accomplishments. That division eventually will take over responsibility for the Multi-National Division's mission area, officials said.

Czerwinski said the close working relationship among all nationalities in the division has helped build understanding on a national level, and he is proud of his Ukrainian allies for the role they played.

"For Iraq, for Iraqi people for the multinational division, this is a big success," he said. "More people should know about this."



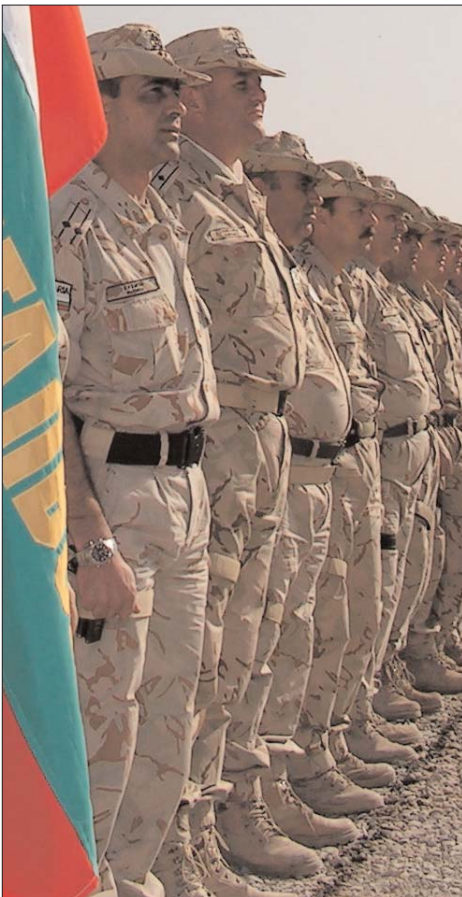
Maj. Gen. Piotr Czerwinski presented these plaques to his departing Ukrainian allies during a farewell ceremony in Al Kut.

Ukrainian soldiers pass in review at the end of a farewell ceremony at Al Kut. More than 5,000 Ukrainians served as part of the Multinational Division Central-South since it formed in 2003.



Polish Maj. Gen. Piotr Czerwinski, commanding general of MNDCS, says goodbye to the Bulgarian Soldiers at Camp Echo.

Bulgarian troops lauded for their work in Iraq



Above: Bulgarian Soldiers stand in formation during a farewell ceremony at Camp Echo on Dec. 17. In more than two years and five rotations, they were key in rebuilding Iraq's Qadisiyah Province. Right: The pride of the Bulgarian Army passes in review during a farewell ceremony on Camp Echo.

CAMP ECHO — A major force in the rebuilding effort of Iraq's Al Qadisiyah Province, Bulgaria said farewell on Dec. 17, pulling out the last of their 450 Soldiers supporting Multi-National Forces Central South.

The Bulgarian Soldiers helped train the new Iraqi Army, conducted civil affairs missions and helped protect convoys from Camp Echo. Since 2003, they have spent more than 500 hours training Soldiers of the 8th Iraqi Army Division.

Polish Maj. Gen. Piotr Czerwinski, commanding general of Multi-National Forces Central South, bid farewell to the troops. He said the Soldiers service was outstanding and their commitment has contributed to the success in the region.

In more than two years they rebuilt schools, created water supplies, electricity facilities and many other projects to improve living conditions for Iraqis. The Bulgarians have completed 175 projects worth more than \$5 million.

During the fifth and final rotation, Bulgarian instructors spent more than 500 hours training 8th Iraqi Army Division troops, conducted more than 500 patrols and 227 escorts, providing security for local citizens and MNDCS troops. They provided force protection, participated in quick and crisis reaction forces and in the humanitarian operations.



Vice President makes a surprise visit to Iraq

ALASAD AIR BASE — Vice President Dick Cheney made a surprise visit to Iraq on the heels of the country's historic parliamentary

**Story and photos by
Sp. Orlando Claffey**
124th Mobile Public
Affairs Detachment

elections on Dec. 18, visiting with dignitaries in the morning, eating lunch with Soldiers in the afternoon, then speaking to Marines in the embattled Al Anbar Province in the evening.

It was the vice president's second trip to the country, the first coming in 1991 when, then Secretary of Defense Cheney, met with troops in southern Iraq after the liberation of Kuwait.

"What has started here in Iraq has had a tremendous impact throughout the region," said Cheney.

"The election was a great milestone. I

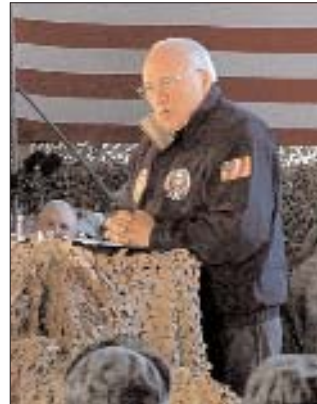
am encouraged by the tremendous results. There was participation all across the country."

The trip was kept so secret that Iraqi President Jalal Talibani was unaware he was meeting with the Vice President until Cheney greeted him in front of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad's residence in Baghdad.

"We are proud to have our good friend here," he said. "It is a honor to have [Cheney] with us in Baghdad."

Iraq and the United States have the same enemy, said Talibani, and are both partners in the War on Terror.

The Iraqi people "suffered under the worst kind of dictatorship," but said he was



Vice President Dick Cheney speaks at a rally with Marines at Al Asad Air Base west of Ramadi.

grateful the American military helped liberate Iraq.

Cheney also met with Prime Minister Ibrahim Al Jaafari, who thanked the vice president for his efforts.

"The year 2005 is the most important in Iraqi history," said Jaafari about the successful elections. "Even those who were supportive did not realize we could do it in such a short period of time."

After talking with senior military advisors, Cheney flew by Blackhawk helicopter to Taji Air Base, west of Baghdad, where he ate lunch with Iraqi and U.S. Soldiers and reviewed two brigades of the 9th Iraqi Mechanized Infantry Division.

The unit, comprised of tanks and troop carriers assembled from scratch by Iraqi engineers, secured 73 polling sites during the parliamentary elections and is just a month away from operating independently of Coalition support.

Cheney then traveled to Al Asad Air Base, the second largest air base in Iraq and staging point for many operations in the Al Anbar Province. There he spoke to Marines from the 2nd Marine Division during a rally.

"Because you are here, a rising democracy can succeed," said Cheney.

"Each one of you is helping to write a proud chapter in our nation's history. The only way to lose this fight is to quit."

The terrorists are in Iraq, he said, "It is your job to make them miserable."

This is the first stop on a tour, which will take him to Oman, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.



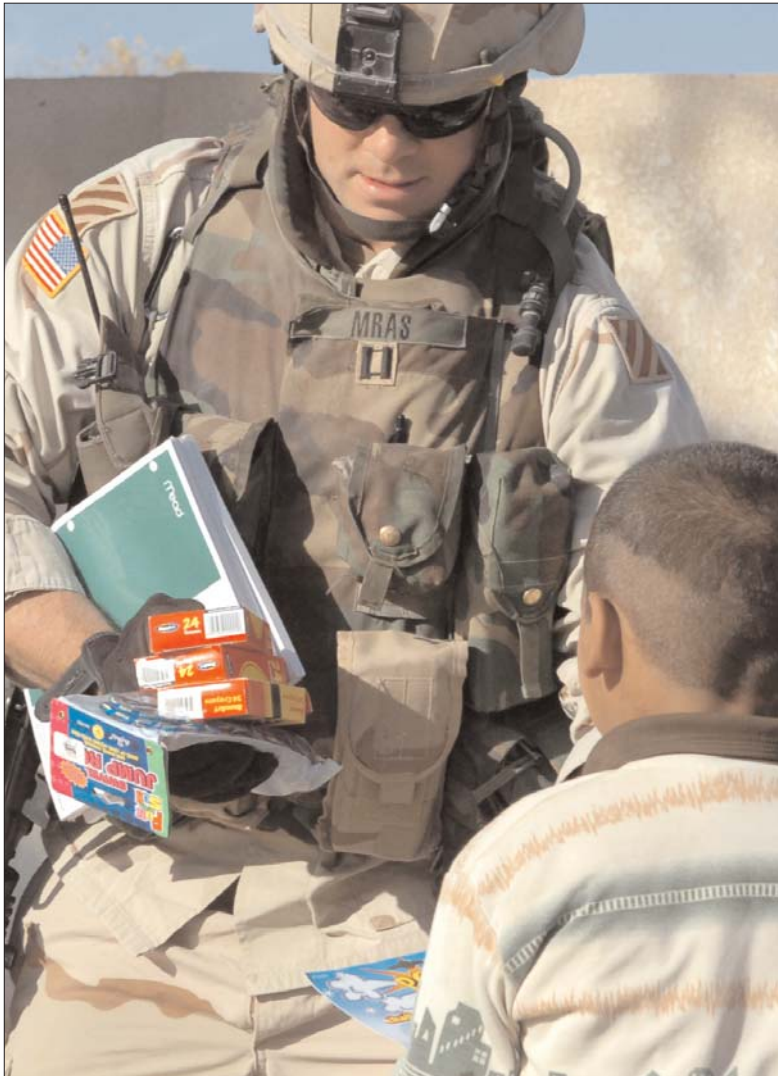
Vice President Dick Cheney greets an Iraqi Soldier from the 1st Bde., 9th Mechanized Inf. Div., from Taji on Dec. 17. Cheney made a surprise visit to Iraq as part of a six-country tour of the Middle East.

Task Force Baghdad Soldiers assigned to the 4th Bde. Combat Team, 3rd Inf Div. were on hand today at the Karrada District Council to donate \$4 million worth of construction equipment Dec. 13.

The equipment includes 33 trucks, excavators, bucket loaders and dump trucks that will greatly increase TF Baghdad's ability to repair its essential services.

"It is far more expensive for the Iraqis to rent or use contractors," said Lt. Col. Vince Quarles, 4th Bde. Troops Bn. commander. "With this equipment they can save time and money, and they don't need us to help."

Toy donations change of pace for troops



Capt. Scott Mras, commander of Company Fox 2/7 Inf., 3rd Inf. Div., gives school supplies to the children of Abua-Jeel School in Tikrit. The supplies were donated by Girl Scouts from Pennsylvania.

TIKRIT — The Soldiers of 3rd Infantry Division's Company A, 3rd Platoon, 2 Brigade, 7th Infantry Regiment were given a slightly different mission than

**Story and photo by
Staff. Sgt.
Mark Wojciechowski
133rd Mobile Public
Affairs Detachment**

they are accustomed. The usual mission of Company A, also known as "Rage," is to sweep the streets hunting for insurgents making the area safe for the people of Tikrit.

However, much needed school supplies, toys and games were delivered to the children of Abua Jeel School. The excited children, between the ages of 6 to 12, smiled from ear to ear as they stood in formation waiting for their gifts from the Soldiers. The supplies were donated by a Girl Scout troop from Westchester, Pa., earlier in the summer months, when a letter was sent back to the states requesting these essential supplies for schools in this area.

"The children of Iraq have gone through a lot, and for us to be able to do a little bit for them means a lot to us," said Capt. Scott Mras, commander of Forward Support Company, 2/7 Inf., and coordinator of the Girl Scout donations.

The children eagerly filed past the Soldiers and received a toy, a pack of markers and a notebook. When the final box of notebooks was handed to one of the teachers, the Rage Soldiers loaded up and traveled back through the busy streets of Tikrit and to Forward Operating Base Remagen.

Missions such as these are critical in gaining the confidence of the Iraqi people with goodwill. It also builds closer ties between the two groups.

"When we go out and hand out presents and supplies to kids and families, we get a chance to intermingle," said Staff Sgt. Howard Gooze, the convoy commander of the mission, and Matter, Ga., native. "They learn a little about us, and we learn a little about them."

2 Terrorists; IED found during searches

BAGHDAD — Task Force Baghdad Soldiers discovered a house containing an improvised explosive device and detained two suspected terrorists in separate incidents on Dec. 10 as U.S. forces continued operations for the upcoming elections.

During a routine patrol of an area south of Baghdad, the Soldiers of Company B, 1st Battalion, 502nd Infantry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division inspected an abandoned house and discovered the homemade bomb, made with a 5-foot pipe filled with explosives.

An explosive ordnance disposal team was called to the site, conducting a controlled detonation, eliminating the threat to Iraqi civilians, Iraqi Security Forces and Coalition Forces.

Earlier in the day, Soldiers from Battery A, 1st Squadron, 75th Cavalry Regiment detained two terrorists after conducting a search of their home. When the Soldiers searched the suspected terrorists' house, they found two AK-47 assault rifles with loaded magazines and a 12-gauge shotgun.

The Central Criminal Court of Iraq held five trials last week convicting five security detainees for illegal weapons possession.

To date, the CCCI has held 789 trials of insurgents suspected of anti-Iraqi and anti-Coalition activities threatening the security of Iraq and targeting MNF-I. These proceedings have resulted in 717 individual convictions with sentences of up to 30 years.

Rebuilding Iraq

Projects that are shaping a nation



AL HAWIJA - Work is complete on a police station in Hawija. The \$45,000 project will help protect more than 100,000 residents in the surrounding communities.

ALTUN COPRI - A fire station has been built in Altun Copri, increasing the fire protection in the area.

HIT - Construction is complete on the Institute of Prep Teachers in Hit. The 22-classroom facility can accommodate about 600 students studying to become the future teachers of Iraq.

DAQUQ - A 13.6 mile stretch of road has been resurfaced in Daquq, easing traffic for more than 30,000 daily commuters to Kirkuk.



FALLUJAH - More than 100,000 residents of Fallujah and neighboring communities have potable water with repairs complete to the Abu Ghraib water reservoir.



HABBANIYAH - Two schools have been renovated in Habbaniyah, helping more than 1,000 students get a better education.

KUFA - The Al Haqatim water treatment plant in Kufa is complete and will provide about 1,500 homes with potable water.



The Fingers of Freedom

Photos of Iraq's historic election

Photos can be found on www.mnf-iraq.com

An Iraqi man submits his vote on Dec. 15, in downtown Baghdad.

U.S. Army photo by Pfc. William Servinski II

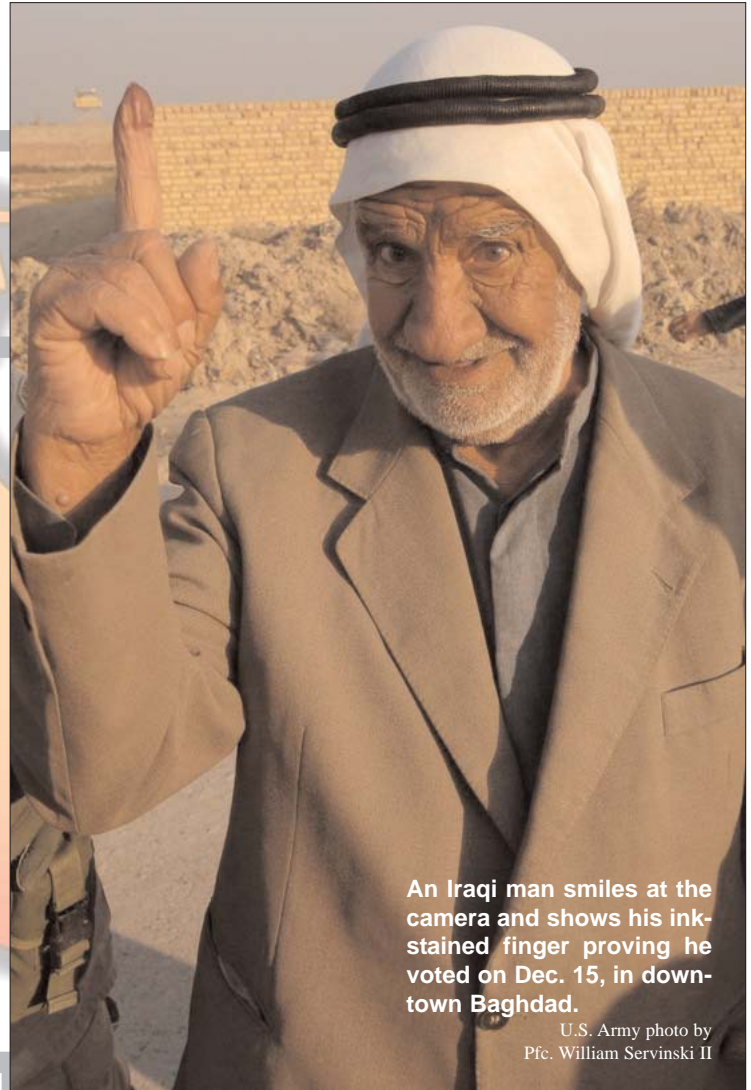


Iraqi voters stand in line and wait to enter the polling center during parliamentary elections in Barwana on Dec. 15.

U.S. Marine photo by Cpl. Michael R. McMaugh

An Iraqi Soldier from 2nd Brigade, 6th Iraqi Army Division raises an ink-stained finger after casting a ballot during early voting at a Rusafa polling station in east Baghdad on Dec. 12.

U.S. Army photo by Spc. Teddy Wade



An Iraqi man smiles at the camera and shows his ink-stained finger proving he voted on Dec. 15, in downtown Baghdad.

U.S. Army photo by Pfc. William Servinski II



U.S. Marine photo by Cpl. Michael R. McMaugh

Iraqi people stand outside the checkpoint to the entrance of the polling center and sing and cheer during the parliamentary elections on Dec. 15. Until October, Barwana's citizens were subjected to murder and intimidation by Al-Qaida in Iraq-led terrorists until Iraqi Army and U.S. Forces launched Operation Rivergate to clear the city of insurgents.